

Congratulations, STEAG Fernwärme!

On October 20, the district heating supplier from Essen is 60 years young

Essen/Bottrop/Gelsenkirchen. STEAG Fernwärme GmbH looks back on the beginnings of its entrepreneurial activity: What started with the commissioning of the heating plant at Schederhofstrasse in Essen on October 20, 1960, has today developed into a real success story in and for the Ruhr area. Today, STEAG Fernwärme, a subsidiary of the Essen-based energy company STEAG GmbH, is the largest company in the sector in North Rhine-Westphalia.

The first customer of today's STEAG Fernwärme in October 1960 was the former Thyssen high-rise building, now known as the "Ruhr Tower". The building, once the tallest structure in the city of Essen at a height of around 80 meters, had a connected load of five megawatts (MW). Today, STEAG Fernwärme supplies around 1.6 million megawatt hours (MWh) of heat to its customers, equivalent to the needs of more than 275,000 households.

"That means that the amount of energy we supply to our customers today is around 250 times greater than when the company was founded," says Michael Straus, Managing Director of STEAG Fernwärme GmbH, once again highlighting the growth during six decades of district heating business in the Ruhr area.

Since 1966: District heating for Bottrop

Around six years after its foundation, STEAG Fernwärme began supplying district heating to the city center of Bottrop. That, typically for the coal and steel orientation of the Ruhr area, used part of the heat produced by the power plant at the former Prosper 3 coal mine. "The system developed by STEAG at that time to supply the residents of Bottrop with heating energy is symbolic of STEAG's efforts to use energy as efficiently as possible at all times. This aspiration has remained part of our corporate DNA to this day," says Michael Straus.

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Since 1971: District heating for Gelsenkirchen

The expansion of the heating supply to include the city of Gelsenkirchen in 1971 was also closely linked to the industrial policy decisions of the time: “When a joint venture with Ruhrkohle AG was created in 1968 to deal with the challenges of the Ruhr mining crisis which was then at its most severe, the Consolidation coal mine in Gelsenkirchen was transferred from Mannesmann AG to Ruhrkohle,” Michael Straus reports. In the following period, Mannesmann sold its mine-based heating plants. “As happened only a few years earlier in Bottrop, STEAG took over the heating plants and started to establish a district heating supply for Gelsenkirchen.”

Seen in this light, STEAG played an active part in structural change in the Ruhr area from an early stage and was a pioneer of an energy supply system in the region that conserves resources and protects the climate.

1978: Ruhr District Heating Trunk Network

This approach by the company also became apparent in the next milestone project, which went into operation in the summer of 1978 after a three-year planning and construction period: The Ruhr District Heating Trunk Network, at that time the first interregional district heating network in Germany, and also the first time that STEAG’s district heating was generated according to the particularly efficient and resource-saving principle of combined heat and power generation.

“This project casts a particularly clear light on the two core competencies of STEAG, which have been decisive for the company to this day: a high degree of technical know-how and the associated problem-solving skills and the equally necessary energy industry expertise to ensure that convincing planning also leads to commercial success,” says Joachim Rumstadt, Chairman of the Board of Management of STEAG GmbH.

1989: District heating from Herne

Around 30 years ago – as is the case again today – construction of a power plant in Herne was the center of interest: Then, in the form of the Herne IV power plant unit, a powerful heat extraction system was put into operation at the site for the first time in order to supply the district heating customers in Essen, Bottrop and Gelsenkirchen from Herne. “Today, we are writing a new chapter in STEAG’s corporate history at the Herne site with the construction of a new combined cycle power plant,” says Joachim Rumstadt.

The new, highly efficient gas-fired power plant will go into operation by the end of 2022 and replace the coal-fired power plant. STEAG Fernwärme’s carbon footprint, which is already good today, will be noticeably improved once again by the changeover from hard coal to natural gas.

Six decades of success

Looking back, the past six decades have been an impressive success story for STEAG Fernwärme, as the company’s energy performance data quoted at the beginning of this article impressively demonstrates. But the company’s commercial success has never enticed the active players to rest on their laurels. On the contrary: “We are constantly developing, planning new projects, pressing ahead with technical innovations and, in tune with our corporate identity, we always keep in mind that the

supply of heat is more than just a business: STEAG is an integral part of what is called ‘public services’, not only but especially in the Ruhr area,” says Michael Straus, outlining how his company sees itself.

In this respect, it was only logical for STEAG, in a partnership with the municipal utility Stadtwerke Essen, to push ahead once again with the expansion of the district heating system in Essen: “The ‘Eastern Line’, the first of three construction phases of which has now been successfully completed apart from some minor remaining work, is the necessary condition for supply of district heating to 19 further districts of Essen. The first contracts with major customers and end-users have already been concluded. From the end of 2020, the new ALDI North Campus in Essen-Kray will be supplied with district heating. At about the same time, the district heating supply for the new TÜV-Nord office building in Essen-Frillendorf will start. For the city of Essen, this expansion of the district heating supply is a big step forward in terms of sustainability and climate protection,” says Michael Straus, underlining the importance of the project.

Looking back to the future

In 2021, the “Eastern Line” project will have been completed. STEAG Fernwärme will then set about developing further new project ideas, pressing ahead with technical innovations and thus not only continuing its own success story, but also remaining a successful player and shaper of structural change in the Ruhr metropolitan region.

About STEAG

For over 80 years, STEAG has stood for efficient and reliable power generation, both in Germany and abroad. As an experienced partner, we support our customers comprehensively in all phases of power supply. We design, develop, implement, operate and market highly efficient energy solutions – from distributed generation facilities based on renewable energy sources to large central power plants and recycling of their by-products. Together with customized solutions in the field of electricity and heat supply, we also provide a wide range of energy services – increasingly on the basis of renewables.

About STEAG Fernwärme GmbH

As the largest district heating company in North Rhine-Westphalia, STEAG Fernwärme covers the heating requirements of more than 275,000 residential units with an annual heat supply of 1.6 billion kilowatt hours (kWh). More than 90 percent of this heat is generated in combined heat and power (CHP) generation plants. The heat is distributed to the inner-city district heating networks of Bottrop, Essen and Gelsenkirchen via the Ruhr district heating trunk network, the first interregional district heating network in Germany. Through this wide-ranging supply network with a total length of more than 680 kilometers, STEAG ensures that apartments, public buildings, swimming pools, hospitals and industrial and commercial enterprises are supplied with convenient heating as and when required. The reduction in CO₂ emissions achieved by the use of district heating makes a significant contribution to reducing the burden on the environment. District heating is safe, clean and convenient – a congenial kind of energy. Since 2018, MUNICH ERGO AssetManagement GmbH (MEAG) has held a 49 percent stake in STEAG Fernwärme GmbH.